

The following is material taken from: **Metalpoint Drawing: The History and Care of a Forgotten Art**, Beth Antoine INF 392E: Technology and Structure of Records Materials Karen L. Pavelka, Instructor November 7, 2007

“In order to avoid careless facility, I dig my roots obstinately, stubbornly in the crude untaught line buried in the living flesh of the primitives, a line whose purity pours out and flows so surely in the transparency of its sunny clarity...I dedicate my ardent wish to draw with all the precision possible, using the inflexible media of silverpoint and goldpoint that reveal instantly the clearest graphic eloquence.”

- *Joseph Stella*

Metalpoint is a drawing and writing medium that dates from antiquity and was particularly popular from the 14th century to the beginning of the 16th. The technique of metalpoint involves dragging a stylus of metal across a substrate prepared with a slightly abrasive surface coating, or ground. As the metal is drawn along the surface, tiny particles of metal are left behind, creating a mark. Although it is quite difficult to use, metalpoint produces a particularly fine and delicate mark, making it a desirable tool for the highly skilled draftsman. Metalpoint drawings require careful handling and special storage conditions because their surfaces are fragile and easily blemished.

Metalpoint was used as a writing tool before it was employed by artists as a fine drawing medium. As early as the twelfth century and likely earlier, Medieval scribes used metalpoint on parchment to rule lines for manuscript text and to layout guides for the ornamentation in the margins. By the beginning of the 15th century, Italian merchants commonly used metalpoint booklets for accounting purposes. The booklets contained sheets of paper prepared with a ground for marking with a stylus. Watrous suggests that metalpoint was used as a writing implement through the 17th century.

By the 14th century, metalpoint was commonly used as a drawing medium, as is described by both Petrarch and Boccaccio, the latter referring to the use of the stylus by the artist Giotto. It was used at the height of its popularity by artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Sandro Botticelli, Fra Filippo Lippi and Albrecht Durer.